

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 12, 2013

Agenda Item: Fishing Regulation Change for Seeley Lake--2014

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

On October 10, 2013 the Commission proposed changes to the fishing regulations for Seeley Lake for 2014. Smallmouth bass have been discovered in Seeley Lake and reported to FWP in the summer of 2013, apparently the result of an illegal introduction. FWP believes this species has the potential to expand to other waters in the Clearwater drainage and at densities that may impact other managed species, including kokanee, bull trout and cutthroat trout. In response to this problem, the Commission proposed a “no limit” regulation for all bass (smallmouth and largemouth) on Seeley Lake.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period for this proposal ran Oct.-Nov. 14. Two comments were received, both in opposition to the proposal. Both commenters expressed skepticism that smallmouth bass are harmful to the current fishery, and one comment specifically noted that bass and pike do well together. Both commenters were supportive of the current largemouth bass fishery, and expressed a desire to see the catch-and-release regulation for largemouth be maintained. One commenter also felt that the “no daily or possession limit” proposal should be restricted to the smallmouth bass.

Alternatives and Analysis

Largemouth bass probably have less of a predatory impact on other fish species in Seeley Lake than do smallmouth bass. They prefer the warmest water, occupy shallow areas in lakes and are limited in feeding during colder times of the year. Nevertheless, they are a potential predator on the trout and salmon that FWP is attempting to manage for. Smallmouth bass are similar to largemouth in that they are less active during colder times of the year, but they occupy a wider range of habitats than largemouth, such as deeper and cooler water in lakes and are often found in the moving water in rivers; therefore giving them more access to trout and salmon for prey.

Largemouth bass have been in the system for many years. Attempts at enhancing largemouth bass, including stocking and restrictive fishing regulations, have been unsuccessful and the fishery is considered to be marginal and used little by anglers. Grouping this species with smallmouth bass in this new regulation is consistent with *Montana Statewide Fisheries Management Plan (January 2013)* which suggested that future management direction for this water included liberalizing harvest opportunities for largemouth bass.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the adoption of a “no limit” regulation for all bass (smallmouth and largemouth) on Seeley Lake. Changing management direction for largemouth bass combined with the need to respond to the presence of smallmouth bass to avoid impacts to bull trout, justifies the establishment of a no-limit regulation on both species of bass.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt as final the proposed regulation change for bass on Seeley Lake for the 2014 fishing season.